

# THE CAMPAIGN FOR WEST PAPUAN MEMBERSHIP IN THE MELANESIAN SPEARHEAD GROUP

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

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## **1. What is the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG)?**

The MSG is a regional block of Melanesian countries.

The MSG was first discussed during an informal meeting in Goroka, PNG, in 1986 among leaders of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and a representative of the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS). Two years later, in 1988, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) was officially formed when the 'Agreed Principles of Cooperation among the Independent States of Melanesia' was signed in Port Vila on behalf of the Governments of the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea.

The MSG was formed to promote trade and economic co-operation but also to uphold 'Melanesian cultures, traditions and values' (Article 2). The importance of common positions and solidarity in spearheading regional issues of common interest was recognised by leaders, this included FLNKS cause for political independence in New Caledonia.

The MSG has developed its own Trade Agreement, established in 1993 and revised in 2005, and was formalised under international law in 2007. The new MSG Secretariat building in Vanuatu opened a year later. An MSG leaders' summit takes place annually.

## **2. Who are the MSG members?**

Members of the MSG are:

- Vanuatu – founding member.
- PNG – founding member.
- Solomon Islands – founding member.
- FLNKS – joined in 1989 (part of the key preliminary meeting held in Goroka in 1986).
- Fiji – joined in 1996.

Indonesia has had Observer Status since 2011 following submission of a membership application in 2010. Vanuatu strongly opposed membership, however Fiji (through leadership of Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama, then Chairman of the MSG's Leader Summit) and PNG (through Sir Michael Somare, then Prime Minister of PNG) were in support of the application. Indonesia's Observer Status gives the country significant leverage within the MSG.

Neither West Papua nor any representative of West Papua is a member of the MSG. West Papuan representatives were participants, alongside fellow indigenous Pacific leaders, of the first regional South Pacific Commission conference held in 1950 (see Question 4) and have lobbied for membership in MSG through various avenues since the MSG's inception.

### **3. Why is West Papua membership of the MSG important for human rights and development of West Papua?**

West Papua is historically, culturally and geographically part of Melanesia and the wider Pacific region. West Papua forms the western half of New Guinea, while Papua New Guinea forms the eastern half.

Indonesia has been in effective control of West Papua since 1963. In 1969, Indonesia held an 'Act of Free Choice' where the government selected 1022 Papuans from a population of nearly one million and forced them to declare that West Papua wanted to remain part of Indonesia. This act of 'no choice' violated the fundamental right to self-determination for all people as guaranteed by the UN.

To this day, the Indonesian military, paramilitary police (Brimob) and intelligence agencies continue to terrorise the West Papuan people. Journalists and humanitarian workers are either denied entry into West Papua or their movement tightly controlled. Indonesia is using an appeal to sovereignty as a justification for the continuing violence, which has resulted in the deaths of an estimated 500,000 people over the past 53 years.

West Papua's membership of the MSG means its people would have an international voice without the influence and fear of Indonesian military rule and oppression. Membership in the MSG would enable West Papua to gain a regional platform from which serious human rights, sovereignty and development concerns could be raised. Specifically, membership of the MSG would assist West Papuans to pursue their just rights to self-determination in the UN Decolonisation Committee and other international forums.

West Papuans seek to re-join their Melanesian family and participate in the benefits of trade, security, worship and partnership.

There is a clear precedent for a liberation movement to be included alongside formally independent nations as the FLNKS is a full member of the MSG.

West Papuan leaders have stated that they are prepared to play their role in upholding the security and well-being of all Melanesian nations. West Papua and Kanaky would be able to offer each other mutual support along the road to decolonisation. The MSG currently supports the FLNKS as New Caledonia progresses along the self-determination agenda set out in the Noumea Accord.

### **4. What is West Papua's historical engagement with Pacific Regional Groupings?**

#### ***South Pacific Commission (SPC)***

In 1947, the colonial powers with Pacific territories – US, UK, Netherlands, New Zealand, Australia and France – signed an agreement in Canberra to form the SPC to address development not political issues. The first regional SPC conference was held in 1950, where West Papuan leaders were able to take part alongside fellow indigenous Pacific leaders.

#### ***South Pacific Forum/ Pacific Islands Forum***

The South Pacific Forum first met in New Zealand in 1971, bringing together independent Pacific states. Its membership grew as new nations achieved independence and in 1999 it was renamed the Pacific Island Forum (PIF). The PIF holds an annual summit and a Post Forum dialogue with participants from a wide range of international partners.

In 2000, West Papuan leaders were permitted to attend the 31st Pacific Islands Forum Summit (PIFS) as members of the Nauru delegation. At this meeting, the Forum Governments agreed to a historic statement expressing their deep concern about the human rights situation and the on-going violence in West Papua. Subsequent PIF communiqués also included expressions of concern about human rights, while continuing

to acknowledge Indonesian sovereignty over West Papua. In 2007, the communiqué included only a reference to the PNG Prime Minister's intention 'to convey the Forum discussions on Papua to the President of Indonesia.' Since then PIF communiqués have not included a mention of West Papua.

## **5. How is the MSG linked to the Pacific Islands Forum?**

The MSG and PIF memberships overlap and the groupings are seen as complementary rather than competitive. The MSG is arguably the most important Pacific sub-regional grouping, as it is composed of Pacific Island nations with the biggest populations and resources for trading and security relationships in Oceania, which includes important regional relationships with Australia and NZ and other smaller Pacific Island countries.

## **6. Has West Papua tried to join the MSG before?**

Vanuatu appealed unsuccessfully to the MSG in 2008 to include West Papuan representatives as observers.

In 2013, the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation (WPNCL) made a formal bid to the MSG for membership, but this was deferred pending an Indonesian-hosted MSG 'Fact Finding Mission' to West Papua. The Government of Vanuatu boycotted the mission because the schedule allowed for only a brief sojourn in West Papua and made no provision for the delegates to meet with any indigenous representatives with a dissenting voice.

On 24 June 2014, MSG leaders held a special meeting in Port Moresby, PNG, and suggested West Papuan representatives unite and form an umbrella group, and reapply for membership of the MSG. The government of Vanuatu followed up that decision by funding and hosting a meeting of West Papuan leaders in Port Vila from 30 November to 6 December 2014. The Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) facilitated this reconciliation meeting during which the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) was formed.

On 4 February 2015, the newly-formed ULMWP made a renewed bid and lodged an application for full MSG membership at the Secretariat of MSG in Port Vila, Vanuatu.

## **7. What is the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP)?**

The United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) is a unified body of various factions of the West Papuan independence movement. The key groups to have united include the Federal Republic of West Papua (NRFPB), National Coalition for Liberation (WPNCL), and National Parliament of West Papua (NPWP), which incorporates the KNPB (National Committee for West Papua).

The ULMWP was established in December 2014 during a 'Unification Meeting' hosted by Vanuatu and facilitated by PCC. The meeting has been recognised as the most important gathering of West Papuan leaders since the struggle began approximately 53 years ago. Any concerns that the West Papuan groups are 'not united' can now be dismissed.

ULMWP is now the only unified and recognised coordinating body with a mandate to seek West Papuan membership to the MSG. ULMWP is coordinated by an external secretariat comprised of five elected members: Octovianus Mote (General Secretary), Benny Wenda (spokesperson), and Rex Rumakiek, Leone Tangahma, and Jacob Rumbiak (members).

In West Papua, three founding organisations have set up an internal secretariat and are working together as a bridge between ULMWP and the entire West Papuan people.

## **8. When will the MSG consider the ULMWP application to join the MSG?**

The MSG is scheduled to meet in July 2015 in the Solomon Islands. It is likely that the MSG will consider the ULMWP's application during this meeting.

## 9. What influence does Indonesia have on the MSG through Observer Status?

In 2011, Indonesia was granted Observer Status at the MSG. Indonesia has successfully used this avenue to deflect the West Papuan bid for MSG membership by the offer to host a Fact Finding mission and through other less direct means.

Indonesia now claims it has 'the world's largest Melanesian population', even going as far as to say there are '11 million Melanesians in Indonesia' – a contentious claim based on including the peoples of Maluku and the lesser Sunda Islands as 'Melanesian'.

Indonesia has had success in exerting influence over the MSG nations by a mixture of diplomacy, trade offers, financial aid and military training support. Vanuatu is an exception because of its long background of political support for West Papua backed by strong grassroots sympathy. Vanuatu also proposes other diplomatic initiatives such as approaching the International Court of Justice.

## 10. What role do Melanesian leaders and civil society have?

The support of the Melanesian countries Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Fiji and FLNKS is needed to bring full membership to the MSG for West Papua.

It is now up to Melanesia's civil society to insist that their Governments prioritise the West Papuan cause over the lure of Indonesia's 'cheque book diplomacy'. This is increasingly important as Indonesia works to strengthen relations with Melanesian countries through, for example, joint military training.

## 11. Why should non-MSG countries, such as Australia and New Zealand care? And what should we do?

In the 1960s, Australia and New Zealand reversed their earlier support for the Dutch plans to promote self-determination for West Papua. They betrayed the West Papuan people, ignoring the travesty of the 1969 Act of Free Choice and downplaying the massacres and grave human rights abuses that have taken place over the subsequent years.

As Australian and New Zealand citizens, we have a clear moral responsibility to take action on behalf of justice and peace for the Papuan people.

### Useful links

- Official MSG website: <http://www.msgsec.info/>.
- ULMWP on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-United-Liberation-Movement-for-West-Papua-ULMWP>.
- History of West Papua (*One example of a web summary*): <http://freewestpapua.org/info/history-of-west-papua/>.
- The United Nations and decolonization: <http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/>.

### Useful press releases and web articles

- 'West Papua resubmits application for MSG membership'. 5 Feb 2015. *Office of Benny Wenda*. <http://bennywenda.org/2015/west-papua-resubmits-application-for-msg-membership/>.
- 'West Papuans unite under a new umbrella group'. 9 Dec 2014. *Office of Benny Wenda*. <http://bennywenda.org/page/2/?s=ULMWP>.
- 'West Papuan Leaders join International Solidarity Groups' (Brisbane). 1 April 2015. *Pacific Scoop*. <http://pacific.scoop.co.nz/2015/04/west-papuan-leaders-join-international-solidarity-groups/>.
- 'West Papuans unite to form new umbrella group'. 10 December 2014. *Pacific Institute of Public Policy*. <http://pacificpolicy.org/2014/12/west-papuans-unite-to-form-new-umbrella-group/>.

### Useful articles

- Camellia Webb-Gannon and Jim Elmslie, 'MSG Headache, West Papuan Headache? Indonesia's Melanesian Foray', *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 12, Issue 47, No. 3, November 24, 2014. [www.japanfocus.org/-Camellia-Webb-Gannon/4225](http://www.japanfocus.org/-Camellia-Webb-Gannon/4225).
- Jim Elmslie, 'West Papuan Demographic Transition and the 2010 Indonesian Census: "Slow Motion Genocide" or not?', CPACS Working Paper 11/1. September 2010. [http://sydney.edu.au/arts/peace\\_conflict/docs/working\\_papers/West\\_Papuan\\_Demographics\\_in\\_2010\\_Census.pdf](http://sydney.edu.au/arts/peace_conflict/docs/working_papers/West_Papuan_Demographics_in_2010_Census.pdf).